

The life of Yugito

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She is Nii Yugito the two tails jinchuuriki. This is the story of her coming of age and her search for acceptance and love.

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[Introduction](#)

[The life of Yugito](#)

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Author's Note: This one shot is an edited version of a chapter of my story, A Mother's Love. Any of you who enjoy this story may also enjoy that one.

Thirteen years ago.

The five year old girl stood rigidly at attention. She had just woken up and was dressed in a simply grey night shirt. She stood barefoot on the cold stone floor. She was cold and still tired, but she knew better than to say anything. In front of her was the man who controlled her every waking moment. He decided everything for her, from what she would wear to what she would eat to when she would be allowed to go outside.

Junsaku-sensei was dressed in his normal ANBU armor and uniform. And as he normally did he had on his mask. All the ANBU had masks in the form of demons or monsters. Junsaku's mask was of a red devil with a frowning mouth and two small horns. She thought it fitting as he never seemed to ever be in a happy mood.

"What are you?" he asked, beginning the morning ritual.

"A weapon." She replied without a second's thought. She was so used to this she could have spoken his lines as well as her own without missing a beat.

"What is your purpose?"

"To strike down enemies."

"Who do you serve?"

"The Raikage and the village hidden within the clouds."

"Would you die in the service of the Raikage and this village?"

"Yes, for I live only to serve and protect the Raikage and the village."

"Do you fear death?"

"No, for death is no more than a part of life. It is as natural to die as it is to be born."

"What is it you fear then?"

"Failure and dishonor."

"Are you happy?"

Her mouth opened and suddenly snapped shut again. He had never asked that before!

"Well?" There was annoyance in his voice but she could not read anything else.

She swallowed. "Forgive me Junsaku-sensei, but I do not know how I am supposed to answer that question. I have not been instructed."

Junsaku-sensei shook his head slightly. "That is because it is a genuine question. I am not looking for a scripted reply but for information. You need only answer the question truthfully."

She looked at him nervously. "Will I be punished if I give the wrong answer?"

He shook his head slightly. "For this sort of question there is no right or wrong answer. You may give one answer today and a different one tomorrow and both would be correct so long as they were each the truth at the time. Do you understand?"

She nodded ever so slightly. "I think so."

There was a long pause.

"Well then, are you happy?"

She thought about it very carefully. Not about whether or not she was actually happy, the answer to that was always no. But rather she tried to piece together what he wanted her to answer. She knew he was lying when he said there was no right or wrong answer. Just as she knew no one cared whether she was happy or not. Everything in her life was a test. Every action and every word was watched and judged. A fact that had forced to develop a sharp mind and even sharper senses.

She made her decision and nodded. "Yes Junsaku-sensei, I am happy."

He nodded once in acknowledgement and gave no other reaction. "You have forty five minutes to wash yourself and dress. I have already set aside the clothes you will be wearing. I expect you to be seated at the table for breakfast in exactly forty five minutes." He made a hand sign and disappeared in a swirl of wind and fog.

Sighing she got moving to the bathroom, another day had begun.

Twelve years ago.

The six year old was walking through the streets of the village a couple steps behind Junsaku-sensei. On the roof tops and side streets two full squads of ANBU kept watch on their progress while trying to remain discreet. They were all but invisible to the villagers but with her vision and sense of smell she had no trouble keeping track of them. She was allowed to train outside in the compound daily, but actually going through the village was a rarity.

Everyone knew who she was. As she and her sensei came down the street people *ran* to the other side. All conversations came to an abrupt halt as people stopped to stare at her. Their looks held curiosity and surprise and distaste, but above all they looked at her with fear.

"Junsaku-sensei," she spoke quietly.

He did not break his stride but turned his head back to her a little.
"Yes?"

"Why is everyone afraid of me?"

She couldn't see his face of course, but somehow she got the sense that he looked uncomfortable. "People will always fear what they do not understand. That is human nature." Before she could ask what exactly he meant by that he turned away and picked up his pace a bit. "Come, we cannot keep the Yondaime Raikage waiting.

Standing in the reception area everyone around her tried to pretend she wasn't there. They weren't very good at it. She could see the secretaries and other civilians constantly glancing and then looking away. Normally with the ANBU there was always a trace amount of fear scent, even with Junsaku-sensei. Here the stink of fear was so thick she thought she might begin to choke on it. It was actually a relief to see the Raikage's office door open and Junsaku motioning her to come.

As she approached the door Junsaku bent down and whispered in her ear. "Behave exactly as I showed you, and do not speak unless spoken to."

Her answer was a quick and silent nod. She strode in the office and came to a stop five feet in front of the Raikage's desk. She gave him a deep and very respectful bow. "ANBU trainee Nii Yugito reporting as ordered Raikage-sama."

He gave a slight nod in acknowledgement. Sitting behind his desk he carefully looked her over. Whatever he was thinking he hid it well. He had a lot of fear scent. His lips were turned down, but that didn't surprise her. People rarely smiled around her.

"So you are Yugito," the Raikage said neutrally. "You are a very special little girl. Do you know *why* you are special?"

She noticed Junsaku stiffen just a bit. "No Raikage-sama," she answered truthfully.

Again the Raikage seemed to study her. He came to a decision. "You are aware of the seal written on your back?"

"Hai Raikage-sama."

"You are what is known as a, 'jinchuuriki.' That seal was placed on you on the day of your birth so that a powerful demon could be locked inside you."

And with those few words all semblance or order left her world. "What?" She felt a sudden mounting terror. Horrid images of a monster tearing her apart from the inside out filled her mind.

"You hold within you a demon," the Raikage repeated with great patience. "To be precise you hold the two tailed demon cat, Nibi. Because of this you will one day have great power. Power you will use in service to this village."

Despite her shock her discipline held, if only just barely. "Hai Raikage-sama."

She was sitting on her bed with her knees drawn up and her arms wrapped around them. She was shaking and she was crying. She had a monster inside of her. A monster that had been put in her *on purpose*, she was so scared.

There was a single knock and the door opened. Junsaku never asked or needed permission to enter her quarters. Even the knock was just done out of courtesy. Junsaku entered and shut the door behind him. He strode over to her bed and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Why are you crying?" He asked sharply. "You are being taught to be ninja. For a ninja to cry is shameful. What is the twenty fifth rule of ninja conduct?"

Yugito quickly wiped her eyes and tried to bring her crying to a stop. "No matter what happens true shinobi must never show their emotions. The mission is the only priority. Carry that in you heart and never shed a tear."

"So stop your crying." He sat down on the edge of her bed. "You have no cause for tears."

Her head snapped back up so she could stare at his mask. "What?! I have a demon inside me!" She could feel the panic rising up in her.

Junsaku sighed and reached up to pull off his devil mask. The face he revealed was not a handsome one. It was the face of a man in his fifties who had seen and done many things and survived. His nose was large and stubby and his chin seemed to jut out too far. Wrinkles covered his face and there was a small scar just beneath his left eye. His hair was mostly grey but still with some blonde. The eyes were a surprise. They were a beautiful grayish blue. They held a startling clarity, as though nothing could ever fool them. When Junsaku-sensei looked at her without the mask on she was always drawn to his eyes and always felt they could see straight through to her heart.

"So?" He asked calmly. "That was true yesterday as well. It has been true for your entire life. All that has changed is that you are now aware of it."

Thinking about it that way did help a little, but only a little. "What will happen to me? What will the demon do to me?"

"Nothing," he said. "So long as the seal is active and you do not voluntarily choose to release the Nibi the demon cannot harm or control you." A look of worry crossed his face. "Though it seems likely the demon will be able to talk to you."

"Talk to me?" She had images of a huge scaly beast with sharp claws and a mouth filled with pointy teeth hulking over her.

Junsaku nodded. "That is right; the demon will be able to speak to you within your mind. You may expect all sorts of threats and demands that you release the seal. But keep in mind that the demon *cannot* harm or control you unless you allow it to."

"It can't hurt me?" She sounded doubtful.

"It cannot." Junsaku said firmly. "The demon is the prisoner and you are its jailer. It would have been pointless to implant the demon in you if it were to control you."

"Why was it?" She asked. "Why was this done to me?"

He tried not to show it, but his eyes held sympathy for her and she could smell his concern. "It was done so that you could one day use the demon's power to protect the village. You know that in the Third Great Ninja war that much of our country was over run and this village nearly destroyed?" She nodded, she knew all about her village's history. "It is to make sure that such a thing can never happen again that the Nibi was placed into you. Surviving in this world demands strength and sacrifice. All Lightning nin are expected to make whatever sacrifice is required for the good of the village. In that Yugito you are no different than me or any other ninja. We are all tools in the service of the Raikage and the village."

She slowly nodded. "I understand," she said quietly. "I am a weapon and I live only to serve." She looked at him questioningly. "Will the people I protect always be afraid of me?"

"Yes," he told her truthfully. "I told you that it was human nature to always fear what one does not understand. But perhaps in time some of them will lose their fear of you."

"Will you?" she asked longingly.

He saw her pain and reached out a hand to try and comfort her. But before he touched her he stopped.

She understood. "I see," she looked away from him. She could smell his fear, it was faint, but it was there.

He quickly put his mask back on and stood up. "I know this has been hard for you, but I still expect you to behave like a future ANBU operative. No more tears. A ninja crying is a disgrace."

She nodded but refused to look at him. "I understand sensei."

"Very well, you may have the rest of the day to yourself." With that he quickly departed.

When she turned back around he was gone. On her bed were ten boxes of strawberry pocky. Despite everything she smiled a little. Pocky was her favorite thing in the world. Whenever she did really well in a lesson or in training Junsaku would reward her with a box. He had never given her more than a single box at a time though. Having him lavish so much of the delicious treat on her at once seemed almost decadent. She tore open one of the boxes and took out one of the thin bread sticks with strawberry icing. She was smiling because she was getting to have a whole lot of her precious pocky.

She was also smiling because this was Junsaku-sensei's way of saying he cared without ever saying it.

"What are you?"

"A weapon."

"What is your purpose?"

"To strike down enemies."

"Are you happy?"

Eleven years ago.

She was in a large underground chamber. A massive containment seal had been drawn up on the floor in the shape of a circle. The symbols glowed with a cheerful green energy. All around the perimeter of the seal sat eight ANBU carefully maintaining the seal. She sat in a wooden chair at the very center of the seal with Junsaku-sensei.

"Try it once more." Junsaku told her.

"Hai sensei." She shut her eyes and concentrated. Nine sets of eyes watched her nervously.

She reached down into her self and tried to draw out the power. She found it, hidden somewhere deep inside. But bringing it out was difficult, like drawing water from a very deep well. Nevertheless she had her orders and so tried.

Like the others in the room he felt it, just the tiniest flicker of that power. From out of her hands and arms a tiny film of red chakra began oozing out. Only suddenly to disappear as quickly as it had come.

She opened her eyes and let out a weary breath. "I'm sorry Junsaku-sensei. But that's as much as I can do."

"I see," Junsaku frowned. "Perhaps we're going about this the wrong way. Even after all these months of training you're still barely able to scratch the surface of your potential. Let us try something different. I want you to take on a meditative state and see if you can contact the demon." There were gasps not only from her but from the other ANBU as well.

"You want me to talk to the demon?"

He nodded. "I do. It is in the demon's own interest to give you power. If you appeal to its own sense of self preservation it may be willing to aid you."

She looked extremely nervous. "But what if..."

"The demon cannot hurt you Yugito. There is no reason to not make the attempt."

She swallowed. "Hai Junsaku-sensei."

She let herself fall deeply into the meditative state.

She found herself in a peaceful forest. The air was thick with the scent of flowers and other plants. The sky above her was a tranquil blue without a cloud anywhere. In spite of the idyllic scene she looked about nervously wondering if somewhere in the forest the demon was watching her.

"Meow."

She looked down to see a little grey house cat looking up at her with green eyes. Around the cat's neck was a leather collar.

"Oh! What an adorable kitty!" She immediately picked the cat up and soon had the cat held with one arm against her chest as she pet the cat with her other hand. The cat soon had eyes closed and was purring, sounding very content.

She leaned down and rubbed her cheek against the top of the cat's head. The fur was so soft. Looking closely she noticed the leather collar.

"Do you belong to someone?"

The cat opened both eyes and looked up at her.

She laughed. "Well since this isn't real I guess you belong to me. I think I'll call you Precious."

My name is Nibi.

"Ahhhh!!" She screamed and immediately dropped the cat. She leapt back about ten feet and pulled out a kunai.

The cat meanwhile landed on all four feet. Nibi turned in her direction and sat down. What had seemed like a single tail turned out to be two. Both tails curled around Nibi's paws as the cat calmly watched the terrified girl. **Is something wrong?**

"You're the demon!" She cried out.

The cat's head tilted a bit. **Well of course I am. Who else would I be?**

Yugito stood there eying this seemingly harmless cat while still holding her kunai. "Are you going to try and eat me?"

I have eaten humans, but I don't really like them, too fatty. I like fish.

"All right," this wasn't what she had expected. "Since you're a demon do you plan on hurting me?"

No, why would I hurt you?

"Because you're a demon."

Yes we have established that. I am a demon, now why do you think I would hurt you?

She stared at the cat that was staring at her. She found the whole situation very, very bizarre. "Isn't that what demons do?"

Humans. She could hear playful laughter. **For such short lived and fragile creatures you really believe you know everything don't**

you? There was more laughter. Listen carefully, not all demons are alike. Some like Kyuubi or Shukaku revel in killing and destruction. Some simply enjoy existing in their animal form. I usually enjoy just being a cat, and occasionally taking vengeance on people.

"Vengeance?" Yugito said weakly.

That's right. I am a spirit of vengeance and I enjoy bloody revenge upon those who have committed some terrible wrong. I also really like just lying out in the sun.

"I see, so are you going to take vengeance on me for holding you prisoner?"

No, you had no choice in that. You are as much of a victim as I am.

"So what happens now?"

Well you could remove my collar.

Despite the strange situation Yugito's mind was still sharp. "The collar, it symbolizes the seal that holds you doesn't it?"

That's right.

Yugito shook her head. "In that case I'm afraid I can't remove it. My main duty to the Raikage and the village is to keep you imprisoned.

Hmmm, well in that case can you pet me?

Yugito shook her head not believing any of this. The terrible and evil demon that everyone was so scared of wanted to be petted. "You want me to pet you?"

Well of course. I enjoy it.

Deciding this had to be the strangest moment in her very strange life she nodded and put the kunai away. "All right." She came over, knelt down and began petting the fearsome demon Nibi. The cat began to purr happily. "Since you don't seem to want to harm me can I ask you something?"

I will allow you to use my chakra.

"How did you..."

Yugito heard more good natured laughter. **We share the same body and mind through the seal. Everything you know I know. And just to save time, no I can't hurt or control you unless you allow it, and yes, when you die I die so I will do whatever I can to protect you.**

"Thank you Nibi."

You are welcome Yugito.

She opened her eyes and smiled up at her sensei. "I did it, I talked to Nibi."

The other ANBU began whispering to each other. Junsaku merely nodded. "And what did it say?"

"Her."

"What?"

"The Nibi," she explained. "Is a girl. She said I could use her chakra and that she would try and protect me."

"I see." Junsaku said neutrally. "Well in that case why don't you try and draw the demon's chakra once more?"

Certain she would be able to do it this time she decided to milk the opportunity. "Sensei, if I manage to draw the red chakra can I have a

special reward?" When she did especially well she would ask him for specific things as rewards.

"What would you like?" Previous requests had been for stuffed toys and her own radio and cd player.

"Will you take me through the village and buy me lunch at a restaurant?"

"Yes I will," he nodded. "But you will have to draw a noticeable amount and hold it for awhile."

"Hai sensei!" She immediately concentrated on drawing out the red chakra. Where before it had been like drawing water from a deep well now it was like standing before a geyser. The red chakra flowed out.

There were shouts of alarm from the others and even Junsaku took an involuntary step back. Little Yugito had not only drawn the red chakra, she had fully transformed into a ten foot tall mini Nibi composed of it. The sense of power and of evil was overwhelming. Junsaku had felt this only once before. Mercifully it was a mere fraction of what the demon had been able to produce.

"Are you happy sensei?" It was Yugito's voice but it had a deeper tone to it.

Junsaku quickly nodded. "Yes, very well done Yugito. The test is complete now. Please let the power go."

She immediately complied and a smiling seven year old was standing in front of him again.

Unlike previous trips through the village they were leaping across the roof tops. Yugito loved the village and wanted to protect it. At the same time she didn't like the way people would look at her. So she

had asked to travel across the roofs rather than along the street. They remained hidden from view.

As they were passing through a neighborhood she suddenly came to a halt. Something had caught her attention. Junsaku was forced to stop as well. He was surprised to see her standing near the edge of a roof.

"What is it?"

"What are they doing?" She pointed down to a group of four girls that were near Yugito's age. Two of the girls were swinging a long rope around and around. The other two leaping up and down each time the rope approached the ground. "What sort of training is this?"

"This is not training Yugito. These children are civilians, they are simply playing."

"Playing? Do you mean like what I do with my toys?" She asked.

"That's right."

She looked at the girls. They seemed to be having a great deal of fun. As she continued to watch though one of the girls tripped as she landed and fell over. This brought the playing to a halt as the child began crying. What was worse she was crying where others could see.

"Shameful." Yugito remarked.

"Hmmm?"

"That girl is crying, it's shameful." Yugito clarified.

"She is not a ninja in training Yugito. For an ordinary child there is no shame in tears." Junsaku explained.

A woman came out of the building the children had been playing in front of. She quickly went over to the fallen girl and wrapped her

arms around her. Soon the girl had stopped crying.

"What is that woman doing?" Yugito asked.

"That is called a hug. It is a way to show care and affection for someone." Junsaku answered a bit sadly.

Yugito continued to stare down at the scene. Fascinated by the sight of a mother holding her child.

At the restaurant people stared as the two of them entered. No one said anything directly, but as usual there were whispers. Yugito did her best to ignore them and the fear scent. She absolutely loved fish and had some baked salmon with rice. Junsaku did not eat much himself but had four small bottles of sake.

Yugito noticed. "Do you always drink so much?"

Junsaku had of course removed his mask in order to eat. She saw his annoyed expression. "You do not need to worry; it would take a lot more than this to leave me drunk."

"Why do you drink so much?"

He paused. "It is medicine for the soul." He lifted his cup to his mouth and downed it.

"Will I drink like this when I am a ninja?"

He looked at her. "Kami I hope not." He quickly refilled his cup and had another drink.

"What are you?"

"A weapon."

"What is your purpose?"

"To strike down enemies."

"Are you happy?"

Eight years ago.

They were on a wooded hill side a few miles from the village. Yugito was excited. Not only was this her initiation into the ranks of the ANBU, but it was the first time in her life she had ever been allowed outside the village. She had trained long and hard to master taijutsu, ninjutsu, weapons, and control of her demonic chakra. It had been very lonely at times. The only people she was around on a regular basis were the ANBU. They were comrades and coworkers, but not really friends. She had no friends (except perhaps Nibi.) The only person in the world she was close to was her sensei, and even that relationship had a certain distance in it.

She was eager to finally become full ANBU and a real ninja. She would be allowed to get her very own apartment and no longer be confined to ANBU headquarters most of the time. She would get to go on real missions and see the world. She would actually get to have a little bit of freedom.

Junsaku looked at her very seriously from beneath his mask. "Normally Yugito you would have had to have achieved the rank of Jonin and had years of field experience to even be considered for the ANBU." He sighed. "But you are the most special of special exceptions and so if you pass tonight's test we will welcome you into our ranks."

"I am ready for whatever test you have." Yugito said confidently.

"We will see." Junsaku looked into the darkened woods. "Bring him out!"

From out of the nearby trees came two ANBU with a chained prisoner held firmly between them. The prisoner was gagged and

was looking about the clearing obviously terrified. Yugito was very surprised to see the man in ninja clothing and gear; prisoners were usually forced to wear brown sack cloth. Even more surprising she saw he had on a Mist hitai-ite.

Junsaku approached the prisoner with a key in hand. "We will give you a two minute head start. If we catch you we will kill you." He grabbed hold of the man's wrists and quickly unlocked his cuffs and chains. He then stepped quickly back. "Let him go!"

The other two ANBU released him. The man hesitated for just a second and looked about wildly, obviously thinking this some sort of trick. He quickly decided that he was wasting precious time and leapt away as fast as he could.

"Junsaku-sensei, what are you doing?"

"That man is a spy from Mist. He was captured in our territory trying to steal one of our code books. He is a Chunin and should be no match for an ANBU." He glanced at his watch. "In one minute and forty seconds you are going to go out alone and kill him."

"Kill him?" She said dully.

Junsaku turned to her. "What are you?"

"A weapon." She answered automatically.

"What is your purpose?"

"To strike down enemies." For the first time in a long while she really heard what she was saying.

"Did you think those were just words? If you really do become ANBU then a weapon is what you'll be and this is exactly the sort of mission you will be expected to carry out. You will go alone, track him down, kill him, and return his hitai-ite as proof. If you should fail we will have to call out the hunter nins to try and prevent him from making it

back to Mist. And should you fail it will mean you are not ready to be a ninja."

She stood straight and gritted her teeth. "I will not fail sensei."

Junsaku looked back down at his watch. Time seemed to crawl by until after an hour or more he looked back up at her. "Go."

She leapt away and was gone.

Even with a full moon out she relied mostly on scent to track him. It had turned out that he was pretty fast, a bit faster than she was. He was heading west away from the village and the roads. He might have studied the geography of Lightning as he was headed into the most rugged and hilly part of the country. The terrain would give him his best chance to lose pursuit. But unfortunately for him there were no wide rivers in this part of Lightning. And even if he was faster she knew she would out last him. Her endurance was inhuman (literally) she could go days without a rest.

After three hours of going all out he was finally forced to rest. That was when she caught up to him.

It was almost sunrise when she finally returned. She handed a bloodied Mist hitai-ite over to her sensei without a word.

"How was it?" He asked her. He saw her look away and tremble a bit.

"Hard," she answered without detail.

"It gets easier, before long it won't bother you at all."

She looked back at him. "Really? Is that why you drink so much? Because it doesn't bother you at all?"

"I drink for many reasons. Here," he held out a lightning hitai-ite and an ANBU mask with a cat demon's image. "You are now ninja and ANBU of the village hidden within the clouds."

She took both items from him. "Thank you sensei."

"I am very proud of you Yugito."

His words made her blush with pride. "Sensei, may I ask for a special reward?"

"Yes, what would you like?"

She gave him a shy look. "A hug."

He stared back at her. "I am not the hugging sort."

"Oh," she looked down feeling foolish. "I understand."

"But how about we go back to the village and I will buy you all the pocky you want?"

She looked back up at him and smiled a bit. "All right."

"Are you happy?"

Five years ago.

Being an ANBU had not changed her life as much as she had hoped. She had her own apartment and her own money. She got to decide what she ate and what she wore and had as much freedom as any ninja. But she was still lonely most of the time. Like Gaara in Suna or Naruto in Konoha, everyone in her village knew who she was. Unlike the two of them she was never attacked or insulted or threatened. Whatever else she was, she was ANBU and you did not disrespect the ANBU. But if no one ever insulted her no one ever approached her as a friend either. Also unlike the Jinchuuriki in other

villages her existence was not kept secret. The Raikage let the world know that his village possessed the power of the two tailed demon. It not only acted as a deterrent to potential enemies but brought in many high paying contracts.

Yugito was kept very busy with training and with missions. She was never assigned a team. Once in awhile she would work with Junsaku. Most of the time she was solo. She received only A and S ranked missions. Many of them involving assassination or something else of high risk and difficulty. She did not object as the missions allowed her to travel and provided her with real challenges.

In her foreign missions she had met a few interesting people and enjoyed the respite from always being feared. But she was never in any one place for more than a few days and she was not the sort of person to approach others first.

Her life was not all that she hoped for, but she was more or less satisfied. Even if she was lonely.

Then she returned from a mission to Grass to be informed Junsaku was in the hospital dying of liver failure and asking for her.

He had always seemed so huge to her. She had always thought of him as large and powerful, as unstoppable as a landslide. Now he was lying in a hospital bed pale and sweaty. He suddenly seemed horribly frail to her.

Despite his weakness he smiled up at her. "Hello Yugito, thank you for coming to see me."

"Sensei what happened?"

He chuckled. "All the sake over all those years finally caught up to me. The medic nins can do nothing for me. I do not have very long to live." He could see the misery in her eyes. "Do not grieve for me, I have had a full life and I do not fear death."

"Death is no more than a part of life. It is as natural to die as it is to be born." She said blankly.

He nodded. "Yes, and it is pointless to fear what must be." He took a deep breath and with some effort forced himself up into a sitting position. "But before I die there are things I must say to you. I have had many regrets Yugito, many things I have been ashamed of. And one of the things I regret most was how I treated you."

"Sensei what are you talking about? You are the only one who ever treated me well."

He shook his head sadly. "No, I could have given you love, but I was always afraid to. I have always seen it as a weakness for a ninja. And knowing what your life was going to be like I thought it best not to expose you to that. I thought it best that you learn to find satisfaction in duty and not in people. And I was afraid I did not have it in me to love a child. But now I know I was wrong."

He reached out and put his arms around her. She stiffened; she was not used to having anyone touch her. But slowly she relaxed and accepted his hug.

"All those times I asked you if you were happy and you said, 'yes' I knew you were lying. But I convinced myself that you weren't. I wanted to pretend that you weren't lonely and unhappy. I wasn't brave enough to be a father to you, and for that I beg your forgiveness."

She felt the comfort of finally being embraced by the one person she truly cared for. "I can't forgive because you never did anything wrong. I know that you cared about me even if your way of showing it was to buy me pocky. Every single time you gave me some or spent time with me I knew it was your way of showing you cared." She hesitated. "Junsaku-sensei, may I call you father?"

He smiled and nodded without letting go of her. "I would like that Yugito-chan."

"Father..." the word sounded so alien to her, but it felt wonderful to say. Despite her best effort she felt tears. She immediately felt ashamed of showing such weakness. "Forgive me, I should not be crying."

He looked at her and then gently shook his head. "It is all right. If you feel the need to cry, then cry. I know how strong you are and it honors me to know you weep for my sake."

His comforting words only made her cry harder. She put her own arms around him and squeezed him tight. "Oh father please don't leave me!"

"I am sorry Yugito, but that is not my choice. But whatever time I have left I would like to spend with you."

He held on for five days. During that time she refused to leave his side. She was actually assigned an A-rank mission which she refused. In the village hidden within the clouds ninja did not have the right to refuse any mission. No one had the courage to tell her she had to go. In those five days she and her father talked and talked and talked, trying to make up for years of things that had been left unsaid. For this very short time Yugito thought she understood what it was like to be loved.

Near the very end Junsaku's skin had become almost yellowish and his pulse had slowed and he was constantly sweating and in pain. But he was ninja and kept his dignity to the very last.

"Daughter," he whispered into her ear. "I want you to be truly happy some day. You deserve that, and you deserve to be loved. Promise me something, that if you find love and happiness that you will not turn away from it. Not even if it conflicts with your duty."

That went directly into the teeth of everything he had taught her. But there was no way she could refuse. "I give you my solemn promise tousan, if I find love and happiness some day I will not turn from it."

With that Junsaku closed his eyes and found peace.

At his funeral she placed down a flower and slowly left. She did not know what the future held for her. Deep down she did not believe that she would ever find love or happiness. But if one person could love her in spite of what she was then maybe there was hope.